Halton Catholic District School Board
Ontario’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) gives all students access to enriched resources

Background

Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) is a school board in Ontario that serves over 35,000 students in the communities of Burlington, Georgetown, Halton Hills, Milton, and Oakville. There are 45 elementary schools, 9 secondary schools, and 1 adult learning center under HCDSB.

Joanne Kenney, Curriculum Consultant and Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Contact (TELT) for HCDSB spoke to D2L about how schools in her district use Brightspace in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). One of the Brightspace tools in the VLE, Brightspace Portfolio, is widely-used in HCDSB. Teachers use Portfolio to connect in-classroom learning with out-of-classroom experiences. Joanne shared with us how four teachers at Christ the King Catholic Secondary School (CtK) in Georgetown, Ontario were using Portfolio in the VLE and we were intrigued.

Here are the stories of these four teachers at CtK:
HOW LINDSAY CHEAL, A HISTORY AND LEADERSHIP TEACHER USES THE VLE FOR ALL OF HER LESSONS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Lindsay Cheal teaches grade 10-12 History and Leadership at CtK. Lindsay has been using the VLE for all student assignments for 3 years. All assignments in her classroom are on the VLE, assignments are submitted virtually through the VLE and assessed digitally. Lindsay feels that her blended classroom approach keeps students accountable for their assignments and papers.

The VLE allows her to continue the lesson even after students leave the classroom – she will upload supporting resources such as videos, pictures, and graphs to supplement what they did in class that day.

For the 2018-2019 school year, Lindsay plans to continue using the VLE for her classes. In an upcoming field trip to a battlefield, she will have her students use Portfolio in the VLE to document evidence of learning.

HOW LAURA BRAGA USES THE VLE WITH HER FRENCH STUDENTS

During the 2017-2018 school year, Laura Braga piloted Brightspace in the VLE in her grade 9 core French class. Students were given an assignment to read in French and practice using French dialogues and record themselves using tools in the VLE. They were allowed to record on their own time at home or school, whichever made them feel more comfortable. Some students used the Brightspace Capture™ solution (a tool to record, share, manage, and search videos in the VLE), other students used Brightspace Portfolio (a tool to collect artifacts and store evidence of learning). Students enjoyed using their cell phones to complete the assignment. Laura then was able to assess the performance of each student and provide feedback directly through the VLE.

For the 2018-2019 school year, Laura plans to use the VLE with her English classes. Some of the ideas she had include using the VLE for book reviews, mock commercials for books students have read, podcasts, and literature circle discussions.

“Students can’t give excuses about losing papers, they know how to access [the VLE] it’s all there”  
– Lindsay Cheal
PORTFOLIO TAKES A FIELD TRIP TO THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Lauren Prisniak, who teaches grades 10-12 history at CtK, likes to use Portfolio with her students. During the 2017-2018 school year, she used Portfolio with her grade 12 history students during a field trip to the Royal Ontario Museum and found it gave her students confidence. The assignment was simple: experiment documenting historical evidence through video, audio, and pictures. They were also tasked with practicing writing about the historical evidence and saying why it was important. Students were given freedom to explore the museum and document their findings through the Portfolio in the VLE tool. On their own accord, some students pretended to interview each other to explain what they were seeing – as if they were newscasters. The conversations were authentic since students felt they weren’t being overheard. Feedback on the assignment was positive: students liked the experience and the creativity that Portfolio in the VLE allowed them.

USING PORTFOLIO TO CAPTURE WHAT’S GOING ON OUTSIDE

Myles Sloan used Portfolio with his 2017-2018 grade 9 geography class to capture what was happening in a natural reservoir behind CtK over time. He took his class outside on three occasions throughout the school year and had them choose a plant, animal/tree, and something that interested them. They then used Portfolio to track what happened over time from winter (when the assignment started), to late spring. Students were asked to come up with a question such as: “why does one tree still have its leaves while the others are bare?” Once the evidence was collected, they created a time lapse and used their evidence of learning to research in class why things were changing and how they changed. Feedback from students and parents was positive.

Currently, Myles is starting an inquiry project with his 2018-2019 grade 9 geography students about how invasive species are getting into the Great Lakes and coming into Canada. He plans to use the VLE throughout the year to support his students.

“Parents really appreciated the hands-on approach... they appreciated that I wasn’t just doing a pen and paper assignment.”

– Myles Sloan
Closing

Portfolio in the VLE is a robust tool that is available to educators in all publicly-funded school boards in Ontario. The VLE is made up of all of the features of Brightspace with extensive Ministry content. Interested in learning more about Portfolio? Read our blog post “How a Digital Portfolio can Help Ontario Teachers.” To get Portfolio in the VLE for your classroom or school, reach out to your Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching (TELT) contact or email K12Ont@D2L.com.